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THE FUNCTIONS OF NATIONAL LANGUAGES IN AFGHANISTAN

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Preface (1)

The linguistic complexity of Afghanistan is the heritage of a long history. Scholars have determined that more than 30 languages are spoken (Miran 1975), and they are mutually unintelligible to each other. The number of speakers in each language varies. They range from several thousand to more than eight million Pashto speakers (2) (Miran 1975, 86; Burhan 1972, 17).

Government leaders in the 1920s realized that nationalism and national identity were necessary if a modern state were to be developed. This could only occur if an identity known as the "Afghan" society could come to be realized. From tribal and semi-feudal systems this identity somehow had to be developed. Fishman in describing the "...process of transformation from fragmentary and tradition-bound ethnicity to unifying...nationality," says that "language....comes to be viewed differently...as the actual range of varieties in the nationality-conscious speech community expands and as distinctions between locals, nationals, and marginals obtain" (Fishman 1968, 41).

The historical process can be brought about even more successfully if the nationalist movements incorporate substantial language planning to help bring unity, authenticity, and modernization simultaneously. The nationalist movement can be efficiently managed if it is a mass movement involving the standardization and enrichment of the national languages, Pashto and Dari (Afghan Standard Kabuli Persian). This process, which of necessity is organized and sponsored by the government, has been started as a means to political integration or, to use Fishman's term, a drive to "nationism" (1968, 42).

The first step was to recognize Pashto along with Dari as an official language; the second was to promote this major language by means of national policy. The policy pursued in Afghanistan for almost half a century has resulted in the country's becoming officially a bilingual country. In 1936 and in the constitution of 1964 it was reaffirmed that Pashto, alongside Dari, should function as an official language.

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(2) No census has ever been taken in Afghanistan, and thus no satisfactory record of the population exists (see Survey of Progress, 1969-1970, 18). However, this future is based on the Survey of Progress and Malumate Ehsayawi Afghanistan 1303-51, "Statistical Information of Afghanistan." published by the Department of Statistics of the Office of the Prime Minister, Kabul, Afghanistan, July 17, 1975.

Language Contact

The major problems in socio-cultural integration are language contact varieties and language maintenance. Problems of language contact relate to both the official languages and the minority languages, whether inside the political border or outside the boundaries of Afghanistan. All of these language contacts have linguistic, psychological, socio-cultural, and political implications for the use of the two national languages (Weinreich 1968, 3). There is a great deal of influence of Dari on Pashto. In the use of lexical items, Dari items have been incorporated and are in use as Pashto lexical items, e.g., the names of the days of the week, the months of the year, some fruits and other food names, and various other labeling items. Phonemic interference is also noticed in Pashto; i.e., the Dari phonemic representations of /f/ and /q/, which are not present in Pashto, are noticed in the speech of educated bilingual Pashto speakers, as well as other Pashto speakers who live in urban areas (Miran 1969 and 1974).

Pashto, however, is structurally different from Dari, a situation which makes it difficult for the Dari speakers to learn Pashto as a second language. For example, in Pashto a demonstrative pronoun must agree in number, case, and gender, while in Dari such agreement does not occur (for further information see Miran 1974).

Dari speakers only learn Pashto if they go to school, where it is a required subject. The degree of proficiency that a Dari speaker develops in Pashto depends solely on individual interest rather than on practical need.

As for some of the sociological and psychological implications of the presence of the national languages, any speaker of one of the minority languages, for example an Uzbek speaker who goes to Kabul to do business, has to learn Dari (the business language) in order to conduct his affairs rather than Pashto. In spite of government effort, Pashto still does not function in such a way as to be used by large numbers of the minority groups in the conduct of their business. On the other hand, most Pashto speakers who go to school, live in urban areas and engage in business, etc., need to also learn Dari as their second language in order to transact their daily affairs.

Dari has had great influence on some minority groups who had different languages before they immigrated to Afghanistan early in the country's history. These groups lost their native languages and, with the exception of some lexical items, replaced them with Dari. For example, the Arabs, who came to Afghanistan during the seventh and eighth centuries, now generally speak Dari with a large proportion of Arabic lexical items included. The Qizilbash, Hazara, Jamshidi and Mongol tribes, all of whom are related to the Altaic race and who came to Afghanistan during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and eighteenth centuries, lost their language/dialects and speak a sub-dialect of Dari called Hazaragi as a native language (Wilber 1962; Gregorian 1969; Dupree 1973). The Mogholi language is an exception, for it is still spoken in three villages near Herat (Farhadi 1970). Dari, then, has had a great historical, social, economic, and political influence on the speakers of the minor languages, as well as on that of the speakers of the plurality language, Pashto.

The only minor language groups who speak Pashto either as a first or second language are: the Brahuis, a small group of sub-Dravidian speakers who are related to Indian ethnic groups living in the southwestern portion of Afghanistan; the

Dards who live in the area of Konar in the eastern part of the country and speak the Dardic languages; and a few other small ethnic groups, such as the Nuristanis and Ormurs located in the northeastern portion of Afghanistan. All of these small ethnic groups who speak Pashto either as a first, second, or third language learn Pashto because of geographical distribution, rather than for political, economic, or social reasons.

Language Maintenance

In accordance with the country's constitution, the expansion and consolidation of Pashto as a national language has been emphasized. This effort has led the country to a certain kind of bilingualism. For example, government officials claim support for Pashto; although in fact, almost all of them function in Dari. Their claim of support has been so great that a Pashto Academy was established in 1939 (Farhadi 1970), while an academy for Dari has never existed. Nevertheless, Pashto speakers have to learn Dari, whereas Dari speakers often do not learn Pashto. In consequence of the cautious policy thus pursued in recent years, a considerable number of a particular strata of the population have participated in this particular bilingualism, namely, the bulk of the intelligentsia, the officer grades, both civil and military, the merchants, and the like.

This situation of government-sponsored and supported bilingualism guarantees the maintenace and use of the two offical languages in the country. For example, the bilingual status in Afghanistan safeguards the integrity of the Pashtuns and assures the systematic use of the national language, Pashto, along with that of Dari. The political frontiers of the Pashtuns coincide with the Pashto and Baluchi language boundaries, which run from the northeastern to the southwestern part of the country. These factors of government support and geographical location have resulted in Pashto becoming one of the official languages of communication in Afghanistan.

The linguistic repertoire of speech communities becomes less compartmentalized in the educational domain. Kabuli Standardized Dari and Kandahari Pashto are used in education as the media of instruction. They are also taught as subjects in themselves. Consequently, educated people are expected to know both languages and to be able to use the standard dialects.

The medium of instruction follows policy guidelines which the Ministry of Education established in the early 1950's. In the areas predominant with Pashto speakers, all subjects are taught in Pashto in the primary schools. Dari is taught as a second language (as a separate subject). The situation in predominantly Dari speaking schools is reversed, with Dari the medium of instruction, while Pashto is taught as a second language. If the number of speakers is equal, then the school is considered a Pashto speaker's area (Ministry of Education 1953). This policy which the government has pursued since the recognition of Pashto as an official language in 1936 has occurred for the promotion and popularity of Pashto. The policy concerning non-Pashto and Dari speaking areas has not been clearly delineated. Certainly in the areas of Baluchi, Dardic, Turkic, and Pamiri languages, Pashto and Dari are either the second or the third language of the students. But none of these groups mentioned are used in the schools in Afghanistan. Dari and Pashto are the only languages of instruction throughout the Afghan educational system.

It seems that most Afghan children have linguistic rather than cultural problems

in trying to accomplish socio-cultural integration. If the majority of the students in a school are Dari speakers, they study Pashto as their second language and vice versa. Children of minor language groups have to learn one or both of these official languages regardless of their own vernaculars. Consequently, it is clear that the predominance of Dari and Pashto tends to create problems of bilingualism for the minor groups and their languages, which function only socially between each individual group. Pashto, although a major language, also results in problems of bilingualism for its speakers; for it has not been promoted by the government beyond being named an official and literary language.

A socio-cultural problem of unsettled Kuchis (nomads) makes it difficult for the government's programming plan to achieve a well defined program for them. The Kuchis consist of different ethnic groups and different linguistic backgrounds, such as Pashtuns, Baluch, Kirghiz, etc. Their population is estimated at about three million (Survey of Progress 1970). The Kuchis' instability and their low economic situation at this time constitute a major problem for the Afghan government. It has been hard to establish any schools for the children, and the Kuchi literacy rate is very low. Their lives depend on and revolve around their cattle, animals, and their trading.

Socio-Cultural Integration

King Amanullah who assumed power in 1919, when Afghanistan gained her independence from the British, strove to modernize his country and to unify and centralize the different tribes. He thus continued an effort begun by his grandfather, King Abdur-Rahman between 1880-1901. But Amanullah's efforts were halted by the revolution which occurred after only ten years of his reign (1929). Afghanistan remained in relative isolation until the 1950's (Smith et al. 1969).

This isolation, which basically was politically established by the colonial powers, precluded the development of any opportunities for the Afghans to increase their less than one percent literacy rate, as well as to educate the mass population, until the 1950s. Since then, the literacy rate has gone up to ten percent and the number of literates or elites who have been educated abroad and/or at home has been increased. Although the number of elite and literate people has gradually grown during the last two decades, this development has been insufficient in scope to bring about any real change in traditional Afghan society.

History shows that in Western European countries the transmission from ethnicity to nationality has gone through a fairly successful development. In the case of Afghanistan this process seems to be one in which the elites are trying to bring about character changes in the attitude and "repertoire range" of Afghan society, though with little or no success to date (Fishman 1968, 41). "The Afghans...have desired to provide a common cultural and ethnic bond between themselves and other... tribes in order to promote unity" (Gregorian 1969, 27).

Afghanistan with its new regime (the republic was established on July 17, 1973) requires the reformulation of the concepts of nationality, and possibility of nationhood and nationalism as well. The country needs to be modernized. Modernization for Afghanistan as well as other developing countries involves the process of social mobility toward nationalism. The tendency toward nationalism requires at the very first stage "the breakdown of communal and hereditary social groupings

and the gradual subordination of old social units (family, village, or tribes) to national community" (Gregorian 1969, 2).

Nationalism itself is a social change; and the society, for purposes of unification, needs to be made aware of the national integration movement, this movement which "seeks to go beyond the primordial ties to family and locality...and to forge wider bonds than can draw the rural, the urban and the regional in to a broader unity: the nationality" (Fishman 1971, 3). It seems at the present time that the traditional values are being undermined and/or modified by a new faith in progress. This can take place more rapidly and effectively by the spread of secular, scientific, and technological education, along with mass literacy. Where only between five to ten percent of the population can read and write, the lack of mass education and mass communication has a direct effect on slowing the development of national consciousness. This development is crucial in realizing progress in a society such as Afghanistan.

Mass and/or basic education has a direct relationship to language. It is language, the basic device of communication, that reveals the cooperation and unity among the people. One of the more positive features of nationalism then, is that of linguistic nationalism.

Language has a primary role in the development of both nationism and nationalism. Nationism, or political integration within a geographic boundary, is usually the first stage that a government undertakes toward the goals of unification and authenticity for a developing nation. Nationalism is the socio-cultural integration of peoples who reside within those geographical boundaries. In a sense, nationism is a vertical development, whereas nationalism is a horizontal development.

Literacy and education are the two important "criterions of status in the villages and urban areas; that is, the ability to do some reading and writing is both an economic and a social asset" (Smith et al. 1969). The low rate of literacy which still exists in Afghanistan, however, is a serious problem which is impeding the nation's progress in training needed experts in technical and professional fields.

Although the attitudes toward nationalism vary according to urban-rural areas, and the level of literacy varies in different locations, the concept of being called an "Afghan" and having an Afghan nation is gradually gaining acceptance among all ethnic groups, including those most discriminated against, such as the Hazaras. Among the many groups a feeling of common identity and interest is beginning to emerge, but very slowly. The feeling of equality is getting stronger, and the gradual absence of discrimination among other groups is a good indication that unity in the society is growing (Gregorian 1969, 27; Miran 1975, 23).

In Afghanistan there are language problems centering around language maintenance, language reinforcement, and enrichment of the two national languages. However, some changes in general attitudes have occurred. Over the past two decades the teaching of Pashto has been more widely implemented in the schools, as well as among civil and military government employees. Its use has also been increased in the press and other means of communication, especially Afghanistan Radio. These educational efforts, as well as the widespread settlement of Pashtuns throughout the country (Wilber 1962, 39), have increased the knowledge and acceptability of Pashto, thus having a positive effect on horizontal social integration (in the sense of increased language choice and expanding literacy).

The attitude of the people is favorable enough to avoid any political and/or linguistic conflicts between different ethnic groups. This linguistic reliability and validity is directly related to language maintenance, reinforcement, and enrichment. That is, the actions that have been taken by the government relate to language functions; and these functions of language have either direct or indirect effects on the growth of national unity and authenticity. These language actions thus, have priority and superiority (Fishman, 1968 43). The ultimate goal of national efforts and government policies discussed earlier regarding language is to attain the solidarity that is a vital part of nationalism.

Conclusion

The major question before us is whether linguistic nationality, i.e., national unification through use of a common language or languages, is a realistic notion in a society which is composed of different ethnic groups. If the Russians have promoted their national languages "as instruments of social mobilization through literacy" (Lewis 1972, 287), and if Canada has been trying to bring equal opportunities between French speakers and English speakers, if Paraguay is trying to nationalize Guarani as the national language along with Spanish, and if promoting the national language or languages through mass literacy and elites etc., has been happening in Europe for the last two centuries, then we have the grounds to think "that linguistic nationalism is one of the more attractive aspects of nationalism" (Haugen 1966, 63). If "language policy based on nationalism, however, has direct implications for nationalism (i.e., for socio-cultural unity) in the new nation" (Fishman 1968, 43), then in the case of Afghanistan it is necessary to bring about a reform in language planning. That is, we have to implement the two national languages vis-a-vis other important minority languages such as the Uzbek-Turkman and Baluchi languages.

Language reform through language planning in the case of Afghanistan is necessary in the following aspects. Mass literacy and mass education, which are interrelated, are the first priorities. The country's major problems stem from its more than ninety percent illiterate population plus its linguistic heterogeneity. Widespread illiteracy, then, is the major problem of linguistic integration and language reform. The function of literacy has had a great effect on the elite group. It is likely to be the most enthusiastic group to think not only of personal or local concerns, but also those of the larger community, particularly regarding matters of national interest. This group, comprising less than five per cent of the population, urgently needs to be increased.

Other serious problems surrounding language reform include the use of formal Persian, understood by few, instead of the standard Kabuli Persian (Dari) in broadcasting, official government speeches, newspapers, etc.; the lack of effective methods being employed in language teaching; and the lack of modern technical terms in both Dari and Pashto. The development of technical and scientific terminology for the purpose of communication in the academic field is necessary in both languages.

Language planning should also consider language reinforcement. The government has pursued such an effort but with limited results. Although Dari functions as the language of business, law and social affairs, and Pashto is only required to be taught in schools, these characteristics are not sufficient for the national languages, Pashto and Dari, to keep up with modern world's scientific and technological progress. Both languages need to be developed. Systematic elaboration of linguistic structure, terminological capabilities, and functions of the languages

within the social structure are necessary to meet the needs of a continued modernization process. In other words, scientific vocabularies should be developed to the extent that internal resources of both Dari and Pashto can provide the needed words. If the process of neologism, i.e., the coining of new words within a language, is not sufficient, then loanwords from developed scientific languages such as English, French, Russian, etc., should be borrowed in order to fulfill the need of terminological capabilities of both languages.

Linguistic structure in the national languages should be able to function effectively. This requires that extensive research be undertaken in grammar, vocabulary, simplification of script, and spelling in each language. The enrichment of one of the national languages, Pashto, can also be extended through efforts to promote the social role of the language among various groups in Afghan society. Dari, throughout its historical development, has established social status among various groups.

Language enrichment as a viable program needs more research. Also needed are the establishment of language academies. Although a Pashto academy has already been established, another academy is necessary at least for work in the other languages. The Linguistic Institute at the University of Kabul should be actively engaged in research not only in the national languages but also in all the other languages of the country, as well as in their different dialects.

The study of linguistic variation is very important to linguistic research and knowledge. More importantly, findings in research concerning the various languages and dialects have significant implications for the study and development of literacy and educational programs.

Adequate teaching materials for both national languages and vernaculars are necessary. Economic and political support are required from the government and other sources to stimulate the development of such materials so that the continued use of Afghan vernaculars inside and outside of the country can be maintained, along with the strengthening of the use of the national languages.

Finally, work is needed to be done on the correlation of functions and attitudes that serve the purposes of unification rather than separation (Hymes 1966, 124).

The use of vernaculars among the different ethnic groups, vis-a-vis the use of national languages must be considered. Problems here are in the use of vernaculars in education and other related communication matters. The question is whether or not the mother tongue, i.e., the vernaculars, should be allowed to be used in schools, in local government agencies, and in other official political matters. If they are allowed, then can the country's economic situation accept or be able to carry the financial burden of developing various programs for each language and/or community? What would the consequences of these programs for the people for the economy, for the goals of nationalism, etc?

To find workable answers to these important questions requires extensive research. However it might be managed, it does seem that in industrial and urban, as well as in farming and rural areas, the betterment of the peoples' lives depends on the accomplishment of widespread vernacular literacy, and/or on the development of

vernacular mass media, as well as extending literacy in the national languages. Vernacular media and literacy will help the country to train and develop a skilled labor force and thus would serve a very practical goal. In connection with this process, it may be noted that "modernization involves not only literacy-dependent economic roles, but also secure political-operational consolidation which, as several recent observers have pointed out, is based upon the attainment and maintenance of mass consensus" (Fishman 1973, 43).

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